



E-Meetings Advisory Committee Report

- The Electronic Meeting Advisory Committee held three meetings during the Interim. The Advisory Committee membership consisted of Delegate May, Delegate Plum, and Senator Miller. Representatives from the press, public access groups, and government agencies participated in the discussions.
- JCOTS has been actively engaged in the issue of electronic meetings under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act since the Commission's inception.
- The last time the electronic meeting laws were substantially updated was 2004. Technology capabilities are far more advanced today than in they were in 2004. The Advisory Committee was assembled to review the current law in light of available technologies.
- It has been noted at our meetings that using audio/visual technologies is something that has become a daily part of business in the private sector, but government seems to have lagged behind in this area.
- We received a presentation from the Whitlock at our first meeting in July. Whitlock is an international company headquartered in Goochland that specializes in A/V integration and video conferencing. The presentation focused on the capabilities of current technologies, and also asked many thought-provoking questions about how and why to implement technology.

- The Advisory Committee reviewed the reports filed annually by public bodies with JCOTS and the FOIA Council about use of electronic meetings.
 - Reports indicate that electronic meetings are not used very often, and when they are, they are usually teleconferences, not video conferences.
- The Advisory Committee reviewed the various requirements of current electronic meeting laws item by item, and discussed areas where change might be warranted.
- A lot of discussion has focused on how public bodies can use technology to improve public access and participation in meetings
 - Interest in seeing whether JCOTS can start some sort of pilot to live stream, or at the very least record, all meetings and make them available in an electronic archive.
- The Advisory Committee held its last meeting of the year at Cisco, using the "virtual presence technology" that is part of the 4-VA higher education distance learning pilot program.
 - This is state of the art technology, where people meeting from many locations (in our case Richmond, Fairfax, Blacksburg, and California) all seem to be sitting around the table together.
 - We heard presentations from the distance learning community about the variety of technologies available that can be used for electronic meetings.

- The Advisory Committee voted on two recommendations:
 - The Advisory Committee recommended legislation that would allow regional public bodies to hold electronic meetings, and would eliminate the requirement in the Code that at least one meeting each year be held with all members physically assembled in one location.
 - The Advisory Committee recommended developing a pilot program that JCOTS can use to further explore the use of electronic meetings using a variety of technology, and to document experiences with the various technology.
 - Part of the pilot will be consideration of whether different legal standards should be established for the use of different types of technology